

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CPR-02 SS-15 NSC-10 SCI-06 NASA-04

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4162

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGUI 739

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CT

SUBJECT: ASTRONAUTS/ PEOPLE- TO- PEOPLE VISIT

REF: BANGUI 693

1. SUMMARY: ASTRONAUT- PEOPLE- TO- PEOPLE VISIT TO CAR WAS SIGNIFICANT SUCCESS IN IMPROVING U. S. IMAGE HERE. ASTRONAUTS ACCORDED UNPRECEDENTED WELCOME BY PRESIDENT BOKASSA AND CENTRAL AFRICAN PEOPLE AND TREATED ON VIRTUALLY SAME LEVEL AS VISITING CHIEF OF STATE. ASTRONAUTS MADE EXCEPTIONALLY GOOD IMPRESSION EVERYWHERE DURING VISIT, WHICH HAS PROVOKED GREAT PUBLIC INTEREST IN U. S. SPACE PROGRAM AND POSSIBLE BENEFITS THEREFROM. PROBLEM NOW IS HOW TO SUSTAIN AT LEAST SOME OF THIS MOMENTUM. END SUMMARY.

2. VISITING ASTRONAUTS JAMES LOVELL AND STUART ROOSA WERE GIVEN UNPRECEDENTED WELCOME AND TREATMENT AND PERSONAL ATTENTION BY PRESIDENT BOKASSA DURING THEIR VISIT HERE. FOLLOWING AIRPORT RECEPTION ON JUNE 11 DESCRIBED REFTEL, ASTRONAUTS AND THEIR PARTY HAD AUDIENCE WITH BOKASSA DURING WHICH THEY PRESENTED HIM MEDALLIONS AND PHOTOS FROM THEIR SPACE FLIGHTS AND ALSO, ALONG WITH MR. BERT KLINEBERGER OF PARTY, GAVE HIM SPECIAL HUNTING RIFLE AS PERSONAL GIFT. BOKASSA EXPRESSED HIS THANKS AND HIS GREAT ADMIRATION FOR ASTRONAUTS AS GREAT MEN OF SCIENCE WHOSE ACHIEVEMENTS ALL MANKIND COULD BE PROUD OF, A THEME HE PURSUED THROUGHOUT VISIT. HE SAID CAR CONSIDERED ITSELF VERY FORTUNATE TO BE ONE OF FEW

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NATIONS HONORED BY VISIT OF SUCH ILLUSTRIOUS MEN. HE AND ENTIRE GOVERNMENT ATTENDED CHARGE' S RECEPTION FOR VISITORS JUNE 11.

3. JUNE 12 BOKASSA ACCOMPANIED GROUP TO PRESIDENTIAL PARK AND GAME RESERVE AT N' DELE, WHERE THEY REMAINED OVERNIGHT. ON RETURN TRIP GROUP STOPPED FOR VISIT TO BOKASSA' S PRIVATE FARM IN HIS NATIVE VILLAGE AT BOBANGUI.

4. ASTRONAUTS HONORED WITH FORMAL STATE BANQUET EVENING JUNE 13 WITH GOVERNMENT AND DIPLOMATIC CORPS IN ATTENDANCE. IN HIS BANQUET SPEECH BOKASSA NOTED EXCEPTIONAL RECEPTION GIVEN ASTRONAUTS BECAUSE OF THEIR REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENTS NOT ONLY AS COURAGEOUS MEN BUT ALSO AS REPRESENTATIVE AND BENEFACTORS OF ALL MANKIND. HE UNDERLINED UNIVERSALITY OF SCIENCE AND SPACE EFFORT AND CITED US- USSR COOPERATION IN SPACE AS EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM' S GREAT CONTRI- BUTION TO PEACE. HE SAID VISIT ALSO CONSTITUTES AN " EXTREMELY IMPORTANT NEW STEP, A TURNING POINT IN THE HISTORY" OF US- CAR RELATIONS. HE NOTED WELCOME PROVES AGAIN CAR IS FRIEND OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE AND HOPED THAT VISIT BEGINS FRANK, DISINTER- ESTED, AND EVER MORE DYNAMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN US AND CAR. HE ENDED BY TOASTING ASTRONAUTS AND THEIR PARTY, PRESIDENT NIXON, US- CAR COOPERATION, AND CONTINUED SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS. ASTRONAUT ROOSA RESPONDED WITH TOAST ESSENTIALLY CONTAINED BANGUI 664.

5. FOLLOWING MOTORCADE OF CITY BEFORE NUMEROUS AND ENTHUSIASTIC CROWDS JUNE 14, ASTRONAUTS MADE HONORARY CITIZENS OF BANGUI AND GIVEN KEY TO CITY. THEY GAVE FILM PRESENTATION AND ANSWERED PRESS QUESTIONS BEFORE ABOUT 400 HIGH GOCAR OFFICIALS, STUDENTS, AND MEMBERS CIVIC GROUPS. ALSO VISITED BOKASSA UNIVERSITY AND HELPED PRESENT PEOPLE- TO- PEOPLE SPORTS EQUIPMENT AT BOGANDA STADIUM.

6. ASTRONAUTS AND ALL EIGHT OTHER MEMBERS OF PARTY DECORATED BY BOKASSA AND ALSO GIVEN GIFTS PRIOR DEPARTURE EVENING JUNE 14. " JOINT COMMUNIQUE" SIGNED BY BOKASSA AND LOVELL (AS MEMBER PEOPLE- TO- PEOPLE SPORTS COMMITTEE) RECITING EVENTS OF VISIT, EXPRESSING THANKS OF PARTY, AND NOTING LATTER' S ADMIRATION FOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF BOKASSA AND CAR PEOPLE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRY. GROUP GIVEN SAME FULL CEREMONIES ON DEPARTURE AS ON ARRIVAL.

7 VISIT GIVEN FULL AND ALMOST CONTINUOUS PUBLICITY VIA RADIO AND OTHER MEANS.
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IM COMMENT: DESPITE VISIT BEING PRIVATE, BOKASSA MADE IT EQUIVAL- ENT OF STATE VISIT AND PERSONALLY TOOK IT OVER. SOME OF THIS CAN UNDOUBTEDLY BE ATTRIBUTED TO HIS LONG- EXPRESSED GENUINE ENTHUSIASM FOR SPACE PROGRAM AND ADMIRATION FOR U. S. SPACE EFFORTS IN PARTI- CULAR . HE PROBABLY ALSO WISHED TO USE VISIT TO SHOW OFF TO HIS

OWN PEOPLE AND TO HIS NEIGHBORS, AND HE UNDOUBTEDLY ALSO EXPECTS
USG TO TAKE NOT OF EXCEPTIONAL TREATMENT.

9. WE BELIEVE OVERALL EFFECT OF VISIT HAS BEEN QUITE POSITIVE IN
TERMS OF IMPROVED US IMAGE IN CAR, NOT ONLY VIS- A- VIS BOKASSA
HIMSELF BUT ALSO AS RESULT OF SIDE PUBLIC INTEREST IT HAS PROVOKED
IN U. S. SPACE EFFORT AND IN THINGS AMERICAN IN GENERAL. BOTH CROWDS
AND INDIVIDUALS WE HAVE CONTACTED SEEMED GENUINELY QUITE ENTHUS-
IASTIC ABOUT HAVING ASTRONAUTS HERE. PROBLEM NOW IS HOW TO SUSTAIN
AT LEAST PART OF THIS MOMENTUM. THEME OF POSITIVE BENEFITS FROM
SPACE PROGRAM FOR MANKIND SEEMS TO HAVE STRUCK PARTICULARLY RESP-
ONSIVE CHORD AND MERITS FURTHER FOLLOW- UP TO DETERMINE HOW SUCH
BENEFITS MIGHT EVENTUALLY BE APPLIED TO CAR.

10 FULL REPORT OF VISIT FOLLOWS BY AIRGRAM.
ROSENTHAL

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

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